

Note on Situation in

BENIN

By one of those incredible African stories, I was eventually not able to enter Benin during this trip.

For the past eighteen years, Benin had maintained an honorary representative in Yaounde, who has been one of only nine missions in the world authorised to issue visas (the other eight are Belgium, Canada, France, Western Germany, Israel, Nigeria, Switzerland and U.S.A.)

Upon arrival in Yaounde, I proceeded immediately to the "Embassy" (which was literally like a chicken house) from where I have obtained visas on previous occasions, only to be informed that the "High Representative" had died one week ago, since when no-one had come to the office. His wife had left for Benin with all her children.

In spite of this, and of the very strict entry regulations, which do not allow entry without a visa, and which restrict you to the airport if you are transitting, I made a try. Here again, two factors worked against me - firstly the airport was still suffering from the aftermath of the Nigerian expulsion, with some people still stranded at the airport; secondly, on that day Liberia had closed its frontiers with Sierra Leone, because of the press reports concerning the President, and again, people were backed up, because they could not proceed to Monrovia or Freetown owing to the cancellation of air schedules.

Under the circumstances, I did not see any point in insisting, and returned to Douala.

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However, during my visits to both Addis Ababa and Cameroon, one factor was constantly repeated, and goes far to explain the very strong position in the anti-smoking campaign taken by Benin.

Dr. Comlan A.A. Quenum, shown as a participant to the Swaziland Conference from Brazzaville, is in fact the Regional Director of the W.H.O. for Africa, and as such, is a major figure. He is also a citizen of Benin.

As it is a great honour to a small country to have a national in such an important post, they will do everything possible to support him. Furthermore, his own credibility vis-à-vis his HQs depends upon his success in this campaign.

I was told by Dr. Quinka of W.H.O. Cameroon, that Professor B. Monteiro of W.H.O. was no longer in Benin and had been replaced by a national of Benin. However, I treat this information with a certain reserve, as I have not been able to confirm it yet on the spot.

Benin will certainly be represented at the World Health Assembly, and will also have Dr. Quenum there, although he will be in his international capacity. It is to be expected that they will be represented at Winnipeg, probably by Dr. Yves Agboutou, the Director of Health.

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